

Cultural Realism: Reconsidering Magical Realism in the Works of Contemporary American Women Writers

PhD Project by Nasrin Babakhani

This study is committed to women writers and aims to provide a comprehensive description of the literary modes of realism and magical realism. I use what I call, “cultural realism,” as a feminist cultural and literary movement to voice cultural experiences that are marginalized in the current understanding of realism and magical realism. The narratives I refer to draw and reinvent aspects of cultural traditions such as oral traditions, folklore, myth, ritual, legend, vision, ceremony, and more, as a means of resisting cultural oppression and political and gender suppression. In this project, I hope to show how the reinvention of cultural traditions serves these women writers as a political, decolonial, and feminist tool. For this purpose, I have chosen six writers from three cultural contexts. Texts include Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* from Latin American cultural contexts, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* from African American contexts, and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, and Susan Power's *The Grass Dancer* from Native American cultural contexts. This selection purposely shifts the focus from male authors to females; all the selected novels are female-centric in that the main characters are powerful women whose narratives question not only the conventions of realism but also the distinctions of the genre itself.